Canadian Centre
For Foreign Policy
Development

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de la politique étrangère

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NORTH KOREA ROUNDTABLE
May 1998
Winnipeg

North Korea Roundtable Report
May 1998

The report summarises roundtable discussion on North Korea, specifically the threats and possible threats in the region and possible partnerships to address human needs and human security. In this respect, discussion focused on Canada's role regarding food and agricultural assistance, infrastructure development, North Korea's energy shortage, the window of opportunity for greater access created by the famine, and the need for increased official diplomatic relations with North Korea, and recognition of the difficulties of reunification.

Policy options:

Canada should:
- pursue contact with North Korea at the non-official level, including NGOs, technocrats, academics, as well as at the official level through diplomatic recognition of North Korea;
- work toward the establishment of a Peace Treaty;
- promote more exchanges;
- renew CADO funding;
- free up CIDA funds for North Korea;
- perpetuate the flow of information with regard to North Korea.

REPORT TO THE MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

MEETING OF THE NORTH KOREA ROUND TABLE

May 22, 1998
Winnipeg, Manitoba

Present: J. Cornelius, P. Evans, R. Fee, D. Forrester, D. Francis, M. Hawes, M. Huber, N. Hudson, S. Lee, L. Matthes, K. Minden, J. Mundy, M. Olsen, K. Park, W. Reimer, A. Sawh

PURPOSE

The group came together to discuss the present situation in North Korea. Their purpose was to discuss the threats and possible threats in the region. They also examined possible partnerships to address human needs and human security.

DISCUSSION

The group very quickly agreed that the current situation of famine, combined with energy and fuel shortages, is a very serious situation. One which warrants both a human and political response.

The discussion centred around the following topics:

Canada's Role

Canadians have a role to play in North Korea for a number of reasons. First, we are not seen as an imperialist presence - something which makes us different from the Superpowers. Second, we share a common element of governance with the North Korean communist regime insofar as Canada can relate to the concept of a strong role for the state in the areas of health care, the economy and the welfare state. Third, there is a sense that we are a part of the United Nations process, and are perceived as being important in that process.

Food and Agriculture

North Korea has experienced agriculturally devastating natural disasters over the last three years - ranging from drought to flooding. However, their problems go deeper than this. They have relatively little land conducive to agriculture and, in their attempts to increase this land space, have begun farming on hillsides, which has brought about further flooding.

The Canadian response in to the famine lies in two areas. First, in the more urgent area of food aid. For the most part, the Canadian response has been through Canadian Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) provide the largest proportion of NGO food aid to the country. This has extended to the church groups, which normally do not provide food aid.

The method of food distribution in North Korea is working very well. It is hindered somewhat by lack of fuel and a degree of North Korean reticence. However, overall, the food appears to be getting to those who need it. The reason for this success appears to be that the distribution is done in partnership with the North Koreans, allowing them to retain dignity in the process.

The second response to the famine is in the area of agricultural aid. This would involve exchanges of both Canadian and North Korean farmers and agricultural experts. This is the longer term solution. Such a programs require some funding from the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT), however, it is a small amount in relation to the amount of time and effort put forth by participants.

Infrastructure and Energy

Infrastructure

After humanitarian aid, infrastructure development is seen as the most important step in the stabilisation of the North Korean economy. This is another opportunity for Canada to become involved in North Korea in a positive manner. However, there is no credit available to finance North Korean projects, so business must be cautious.

There are plans to develop the Taedong River - a project which has a good deal of investment from South Korea. The South Korean element may present an opportunity for Canada to become involved.

Energy

To date, Canada has not made its contribution to CADO contribution for this year. CADO is seen as one of the most important elements which would go toward reducing North Korea's power shortage. Any economic recovery program for this country involves energy and its infrastructure. Its loss would not only be detrimental to North Korea, but it would also be detrimental to Canada's credibility in South East Asia. It is the only institution we have on the Korean peninsula.

Another, more ominous, consideration in the area of energy is North Korea's nuclear and chemical warfare capability. For this reason, it is important that the entire North Korean situation be made more stable - thereby lessening the possibility of desperate action.

Window of Opportunity

The famine has led to a situation in which NGOs have been given unprecedented access into North Korea to help alleviate the suffering caused by the food shortage. Given that North Korea is an insular society which does not tend to trust outsiders, this access can be seen as a "compassionate window of opportunity" for Canada and the rest of the world. Used wisely and judiciously, this could be seen as an opportunity to gain insight into the political and economic situation in North Korea. However, this is a long process which has its roots in lower level human contact.

To this point, some change is in evidence. For example, only 18 months ago it was made nearly impossible to take pictures while traveling through North Korea; however, currently, with the exception of military operations, it is possible to do so unimpeded.

It is also possible that greater insight into North Korea can be gained through international financial institutions, such as the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank, which require economic transparency in return for financial aid.

Diplomatic Methods

To date, the Canadian NGOs have been the Canadian "diplomats" in North Korea via UNDP programs. While they have done a good job of engaging North Koreans at the lower level, it is considered essential that the policy level be brought in to ensure that effective change occurs.

Too often it is felt that issues can only be handled by the Great Powers. However, development and security issues in South East Asia are not the exclusive domain of the Great Powers - Canada has a role to play.

The lack of diplomatic relations with North Korea is not effective for the current scenario. The opportunities for access to the system are available, and Canada should take advantage of all possible avenues for change. China and Cuba were offered as examples of countries with whom Canada has managed to maintain unique relations separate from the Great Powers.

It was seen as necessary for Canada to remove North Korea from the "area of control list" with regard to import/export sanctions. This would help free CIDA dollars which are currently prohibited from being used to aid North Korea.

A major psychological barrier between North Koreans and Canadians is the fact that we are, technically, still enemies. A peace treaty to replace the current armistice would go a long way toward the opening of North Korean society. Canada should be involved in the achievement of this goal.

Diplomatic Methods (Cont'd)

Exchange delegations were also seen as an effective means to increasing dialogue between Canada and North Korea, and as a vehicle for humanising relationships at the lower level. The most obvious exchanges can occur at the "technocratic" level, particularly in the agricultural sector. The barriers to date include visas and money to facilitate the trips.

Track I (technical assistance) and Track II (academic programs) programs should be continued in partnership with other countries, such as Australia.

Reunification

With the recent election in South Korea, an unprecedented dialogue between North and South Korea has begun. However, reunification is far from being a given. Rather - it is fraught with difficulties. The enormous cost of German reunification has made South Korea hesitant to move too quickly - it may even have the effect of ensuring that reunification does not take place. At the very least, South Korea would like the North Korean economy to be strong prior to reunification. The other factor to consider is China - a country which would be reluctant to share a 1300 km border with a potentially US-dominated unified Korea.

On a more human note, it is important to bear in mind that in many cases reunification of the two Koreas also means reunification of families. Some South Koreans have actually left good jobs at home to move to Canada in order to be able to have contact with their families in North Korea.

Recommendations

The North Korean economy is in collapse and there is a dire shortage of food. Canadians are already involved and seen to be involved. This situation has presented a "compassionate window of opportunity" for Canadian agencies to gain information about and access to North Korean society.

1. Canada should pursue two levels of contact with North Korea:

   A) **At the "working level"**. This would include groups such as members of NGOs, as well as technocrats (particularly in the fields of agriculture and energy), and academics; and
   B) **At the higher policy level** - this could be done via official diplomatic recognition of North Korea by Canada. Parallels to such a situation can be found in our relationships with both China and Cuba

   It is thought that these contacts may bear fruit insofar as Canada has some social and economic similarities with North Korea. These include the belief that there is (however limited) a social and economic role for the state.

2. Canada should work toward the establishment of a Peace Treaty with North Korea. The current situation is psychologically damaging to relations at both levels of contact.

3. More exchanges are needed between Canada and North Korea. To facilitate such exchanges two things are necessary: 1. Access to visas for participants; and 2. Funding from DFAIT. These would go a long way toward opening the lines of communication between the two countries.

4. CADO funding must be renewed. This is important for both the North Korean economy and for the maintenance of Canada's international reputation in South East Asia.

5. CIDA funds should be freed up for use in North Korea. This would help with both the food aid and infrastructure components.

6. An information linkage is important to perpetuate the flow of information with regard to North Korea. The establishment of an Internet site would be very useful in establishing communication links with other countries.

North Korea Roundtable
Discussion Points

Is the North Korea regime stable over the short to medium term?

How much of the food crisis is caused by the systematic failure of agricultural management in North Korea?

How does Kim Dae Jung's election in South Korea change things in North Korea?

What should Canada's objectives be in dialogue with North Korea? Humanitarian, Human Rights, Economic Trade, Diplomatic, Multilateral Financial Institutions

Given Canada's modest resources what constructive role can it play?

Can we strengthen academic long term contacts with North Korea?

How to identify North Koreans to discuss Agriculture issues?

Is it useful to invite people to Canada?

May 22 North Korea Roundtable

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11a.m.-4p.m.

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May 22 North Korea Roundtable

Suite 855, 240 Graham Avenue
Winnipeg, Manitoba
(204) 983-7096
11a.m.-4p.m.

011:00-11:15 a.m.
Welcome (Steve Lee Chair)
Canadian Centre for Foreign Policy Development

Introductory remarks
Dasey Francis/Canada Asia Working Group
Margaret Hubert/Department of Foreign Affairs

011:15-12:00
Open discussion/discussion points

12:00-12:15
break

12:15-working lunch
Canadian policy options-discussion
Improving contacts

14:30-15:00
Other issues

15:00-15:15
Report to Minister Axworthy

15:15-16:00
Discussion

16:00-16:15
Closing remarks
Steve Lee, Chair